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ABSTRACT

Forum 14 advocates the development of flexible policies for variant family forms and legislative programs which are responsive to family needs whether the family is a single parent, nuclear family, or some other form. Human service systems must be built around people; families should not be expected to fit into mass produced formal systems based on the principle of least cost and on the presumed expertise of the professional. A family's main tasks are to develop capacities to socialize children, to enhance the competence of family members to cope with the demands of bureaucratic organizations, to use these organizations and to provide satisfactions and a mentally healthy environment. The forum recommends the initiation of an "Institute for the Study of the Family" to conduct research into family needs and to create marriage and family living institutes at universities to increase the effectiveness of specialists and professionals. The forum further advocates the examination and reordering of current systems and legislation, including a review every five years evaluating HEW on the inter-agency level to insure quality child care. (AJ)

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CHANGING FAMILIES IN A CHANGING SOCIETY

Report of Forum 14

1970 White House Conference on Children

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CURRENT STATUS

The gap between what we want for children and what they presently receive must be drastically reduced. A Bill of Rights for children, postulated in the 1930 Children's Charter of the White House Conference, was updated in 1970 by the California Council on Children and Youth. This Bill of Rights delineates what we desire for children and clearly establishes benchmarks for measuring what actually happens. These rights are:

1. The right to be wanted and born well
2. The right to "open systems that focus on the future"[1]
3. The right to a healthful environment
4. The right to early childhood learning experiences which are suitable to each child's current needs and which provide a foundation for future educational experiences
5. The right to a system of formal education which provides the opportunity for accumulating broad knowledge, helps individuals to achieve their aspirations, and promotes humanitarian attitudes
6. The right to become a participating and productive member of society
7. The right to receive special attention and support from private and governmental bodies so that basic needs are met
8. The right to well-functioning organizational systems with sufficient and effective manpower to provide a broad spectrum of services
9. The right to a world and universe free from the threat of annihilation by war.

We would add the right to know and use the available options for self-expression and fulfillment which are increasingly

available to larger numbers of people in highly complex and differentiated societies like the United States; and the right of a child to have a family.

Although rights have long been postulated in one form or another, the distance between these goals and their achievement has not dramatically narrowed. This failure to reach reasonable goals can weaken the respect and support of both children and parents for our social institutions. For example, the abysmal quality of health care, especially that available for the poor, led Lincoln Gordon, President of The Johns Hopkins University, to state, "This kind of gap--between the capacity of our society to do something about health care and its actual performance--is the stuff that revolutions are made of."[2] We are undeniably in the midst of a social revolution. But this revolution can only benefit society if we establish realistic policies and programs for children and their families.

A fundamental reason for the discrepancy between what we want for our children and what has actually been accomplished through legislation and programs is the narrow and static conception of family held by most policy makers. They conceive the family only in its most traditional form--the nuclear household of husband and wife and their issue where the male is the breadwinner and the female the homemaker. But there are many different forms of family in this country, and a uniform policy which will cover all individuals and groups is

virtually impossible. We are not against a policy which will enable traditional families to better fulfill the differential aspirations of family members and improve the quality of family life. Rather we are for varied family policies which will be responsive to the needs of members of various family forms.

The most prominent traditional types of family structures now existing, and variations on these structures, are:

1. Standard nuclear family--Husband, wife, and offspring living in common household; husband gainfully employed in labor market and wife a homemaker

2. Dyadic nuclear family--Childless husband and wife; one or both partners gainfully employed

3. Dual-work family--Both parents gainfully employed from the onset of the marriage

4. Single-parent family--Usually with one parent, as a consequence of divorce, abandonment, or separation (with financial aid rarely coming from the second parent), and usually including pre-school and/or school-age children

5. Three-generational family--Three generations in a single household

6. Middle-aged or old-aged couple--Husband as provider, wife at home (children have been "launched" into college, career, or marriage)

7. Kin network--Nuclear households or unmarried members living in close geographical proximity and operating within a reciprocal system of exchange of goods and services

8. "Second-career" family--The wife enters the work force when the children are in school or have left the parental home.

Emerging experimental structures which have an effect on children include:

1. Commune family

   a. Household of more than one monogamous couple with

children, sharing common facilities, resources, and experiences; socialization of the child is a group activity

b. Household of adults and offspring--a group marriage known as one family--where all individuals are married to each other and all are parents to the children. Usually develops a status system with leaders believed to have charisma

2. Unmarried parent and child family--Usually mother and child where marriage is not desired or possible

3. Unmarried couple and child family--Usually a common-law type of marriage with the child their biological issue or informally adopted

4. Homosexual couple and child family--The child is informally or legally adopted.

In the 1970's we find a wide diversity of family forms in the United States, and a range of ethnic and racial variations exists even within the traditional structure. Even more startling, an increasing number of children move from one family form to another before they reach puberty. The infant of a newly-married couple may enter the "single-parent" form if the marriage breaks up. When the single parent remarries, the child moves into a "remarried form" and may be adopted by the new parent, gaining either step- or half brothers or sisters. In addition, the mother may need or desire to work, placing the child in a dual-work family form. Although this case history can be elaborated further, the point is that these different forms present different issues and problems for family members. Human service systems, the outgrowths of policies and legislation, must be built to accommodate these diversities.

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We assume that the family is universal not only to man but to all species. Procreation, sexual behavior, warmth, affection, identification, individuality, nurturance, economic support, socialization, territoriality, and group concerns are some of the characteristics and processes of the family system. For homo sapiens, the family is a group of individuals in interaction; family behavior is the personal history of members according to their position in the family system at any particular moment in their social development. The human family differs from the families of other species because it has been innovative in psychological, social, and cultural realms.

Our basic assumption is that the family functions as a facilitating, mediating, and confronting system for its members who have differing aspirations, capabilities, and potentials. Families adapt to complex urban or industrial life and simultaneously influence the development, structure, and activities of contemporary social institutions and organizations. But largely because of variations in form, families differ in their adaptation and in their efforts to mitigate the demands of non-family groups and to influence the behavior of outside organizations such as the school, welfare agency, or factory. Consequently, the main tasks of families are to develop their capacities to socialize children, to enhance the competence of their members to cope with the demands of other organizations in which they must function, to utilize these organizations, and to provide the satisfactions and a mentally healthy

PS 004227

environment intrinsic to the well-being of a family.[3]

The essence of the modern situation is that many alternative patterns exist for meeting contingencies. In the urban setting, a great variety of jobs, schools, residences, and facilities are available to family members, with the largest number of options available to the higher social classes and elites. For some families, especially those of the middle and upper classes, the problem is too many choices, or "option glut."[4] For ethnic and racial groups, such as Chicanos and Blacks, there is option scarcity with continuous pressure to limit or take away existing alternatives. As children acquire additional skills through informal and formal training systems, the potential range of options increases. Enlightened modern leaders work to expand the available options for more and more people in such life sectors as education, work, and leisure.[5]

Although the number of options available to an individual varies according to his class, ethnic, and racial status, some families seem able to enhance the capacity of their members to choose from among available options and to perform competently in new roles and within organizations. Other families seem less able to do so, producing instead various manifestations of individual and familial malfunctioning. There is no single "royal road" to successful family readaptation to modern life. We know that the way in which community, social, welfare, and educational systems support or constrain the child

and his family has some impact upon the development of competence in the use of options. Moreover, in modern societies the growing needs and demands for social, educational, and welfare services as well as preventive and therapeutic health care are extending beyond the capacities of even potential professional and paraprofessional manpower. As a result, the family--as a social unit with caretaking, therapeutic, socializing, expediting, and handling activities--is a vital and sometimes unrecognized partner of bureaucratic service organizations having health, welfare, and rehabilitative objectives.[6]

In summary, the salient prerequisites for individual and family survival are the individual's competence in using bureaucratic organizations, the family's success in developing these management capabilities, and family members' uses of options. Families which "make it" are those which have become aware of and use options and develop successful linkages with non-family organizations.

In the United States, marked organizational differentiation and occupational specialization exist. We should certainly expect a parallel development of differential family forms. Family structures which deviate from the standard nuclear form have become more numerous and visible. Within each social, racial, and ethnic group, varing incidences of family forms are found, their exact numbers difficult to estimate. The number of dual-work families in the United States, for example, can best be estimated from census reports on mothers

with children who were, or currently are, gainfully employed. From 1948 to 1969, the percentage of mothers in the labor force with children under age six increased from 13 to 30 percent, and mothers of school-age children, six to seventeen, from 31 to 51 percent. Throughout this period, a disproportionate number of non-white mothers, 16 years and over, were gainfully employed. Of the 9.8 million mothers in the work force in March 1969, 1.2 million were non-white; 63.7 percent of these non-whites (compared to 47.3 percent of whites) had children 6 to 17 years; 44.3 to 26.8 percent had children under age six; 51.6 to 32.9 percent had none under age three.[7] These data reflect the necessity for a large proportion of non-white mothers with small children to enter the labor market.

Members in each type of family have needs, problems, capabilities, and aspirations; some they share with members of other family types and some are limited to their own family form. The major task is to use our advanced technology and scientific discoveries to support all family forms by harnessing and re-allocating the resources of non-family groups and organizations to improve conditions for children. <u>The solution is to build policies, structures, and environments around people rather than to fit people into mass-produced formal systems and unimaginatively created physical, social, and interactional space</u>.

During the past decade, one significant research finding on emergent family forms and activities in a rapidly changing

society is that families function reciprocally with existing social organizations and institutions. This discovery leads to rejecting the view that families are the victims of a changing technology or "birthquake" and that deviance and family dissolution are products of these changes. In place of a cause-effect relationship, a reciprocity model links man intimately with his environment, or ecosystem. He is attempting to preserve his environment while seeking quality of life.[8] The problems of the family, and especially children, center more on the linkages with community structures and bureaucratic organizations, the allocation of economic resources, and population distribution, rather than on society-wide demographic changes or technological developments.

Another development of the 1960's has been the emergence of the client-centered society. The client (the recipient of health, welfare, education, and other types of services) is rebelling against authority and against his subordination in matters of prime concern to him. The traditional client-professional or agency relationship is becoming increasingly inappropriate. The clients, whether they are families or individual members, are tired of being acted upon; this kind of relationship perpetuates the basic inequalities in our society and leads to "institutional meddling under the cover of professional concern."[9] In the 1970's, a movement is underway to destroy the cultural myth of a "right" or "best" way to behave, believe, work, or play. That movement pleads

for cultural pluralism and policies based upon diversity. The clients are demanding (and receiving some support from professionals) that change be away from "solutions" and "doing things for people" and toward a philosophy of allowing diversity by providing equal opportunity to share resources.[10] The current trend is toward making resources increasingly available to larger numbers of people, to encouraging social experiments, and setting only outer limits. The expansion of knowledge and the increasing educational levels and competence of people has led to this position. Participation, questioning, and experimenting are now demanded and preferred to packaging and delivering of services by professionals to clients.

Behavioral science research during the past fifty years has produced one major conclusion on social change. Interventions of any kind -- whether they are improved agricultural practices, mass media and communication systems, educational procedures, or work systems which promise improved standard of living -- are accepted and integrated into the culture's social fabric when individuals voluntarily choose this new process or intervention, see its superiority, and find it an improvement because of their participation in its development and use. Although some practices can be forcefully introduced and have some effect,[11] the rate of rejection is high and the resulting anguish cannot be estimated.

To increase the chances that positive innovations will be accepted by children and their families, we must involve them in the decision-making process. Any set of recommendations should be predicated on support for diversity in family forms and life styles.

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Primitive measures and tactics toward those forms that differ from the traditional must be eliminated and experimentation in ways of living accepted. We hope that the White House Conference will not support resolutions that attempt to prejudge and restrict the future shape of the society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the White House Conference make visible the increased variability in family forms and recognize that diversity is based on the right of individuals to live in any family form they feel will increase their options for self-fulfillment. We do not presume to give approval to any particular family form, although we recognize that the majority of children may find the conditions for character and personality development in the standard nuclear family. Our central concern is that family conditions foster healthy physiological, emotional, and social growth of children.

We further recommend the appointment of a Presidential Commission with power to examine and make recommendations of the following issues:

a) Investigate current legislation which is discriminatory against members of variant family structures

b) Examine the harmful as well as positive consequences of existing legislation and programs, such as ADC, aimed purportedly to support the variant family form -- single-parent family

c) Develop flexible policies and programs buttressed by legislation fitted to the needs and aspirations of members of variant family forms.

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We recommend that the government through an appropriate office of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare or some other agency undertake an educational program aimed at changing the basic mode of operation of human service systems. The basic change would be from an uni-directional mode of operations to one of reciprocity where clients of target populations collaborate with professionals toward solving their problems. Special attention should be given to the needs of children based on research findings and the needs perceived by children and parents. New programs of facilities and services for children should require the involvement of children in the decision-making process. Wherever appropriate, children and families of the social category to be served should be consulted on the design, program, and administration of such facilities as day care centers, schools, and neighborhood centers.

We recommend that an Institute for the Study of the Family be created within NIMH or NIH of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. This multi-purpose, inter-disciplinary, and professional organization would have the following basic objectives:

1. To conduct basic research on formation of diagnostic tools for measuring the health, social competence, and nutritional status of the family and to develop model programs for formal and informal socialization of children. These programs will extend beyond the conveyance of survival skills and involve role learning and development of self-concepts.

2. To undertake basic studies on the incidence and prevalence of variant family forms in cooperation with the Bureau of the Census. These studies should have a built-in longitudinal dimension to answer such questions as: Are these family forms temporary or transitory? Do patterns of

prevalence change according to the individual's stage in the family life cycle? Do individuals move from one form into another according to their stage in the life cycle?

3. To undertake longitudinal studies on reducing prejudice, discrimination, and punitive behavior toward variant family forms. Such studies would complement those which will investigate the effects of different family forms upon realization of the human potential of members, availability and use of options, and personality development of the child.

4. To undertake in-house research or support investigations through contracts and grants on family involvement in the development of supportive programs. What is the role of family members in the organization and operation of human service systems? Special methodological studies would focus on techniques and mechanisms for involving client families, especially children, in the program and its evaluation.

5. To undertake and support studies on the linkages of families with non-family institutions and bureaucratic organizations. Such research should be to facilitate the development of competence of members to deal with the exigencies and demands of a technical, differentiated, and bureaucratic society.

6. To investigate further the competence needed by children to cope with the changes within families, non-family groups, and organizations and to more effectively utilize existing resources provided by role models and surrogates of these systems. Research should also focus on how the family functions as a facilitating system to accomodate diverse, and sometimes conflicting, aspriations, capabilities, and motivations of its members, especially children. How do families use available options and how may existing supportive services be better utilized by families on behalf of children? Also recommended are studies on the processes and mechanisms used both by families and organizations to integrate their goals and activities with the objective of developing in children adequate physical growth, self-concepts and images, maturation, competence in interpersonal relationships, and capabilities for using existing and creating new options.

7. To support the creation of marriage and family living institutes at universities. These programs would offer degree and certificate programs for increasing the effectiveness of specialists (clergyman, lawyers, physicians, and social workers) in working with the families.

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> Programs which develop and demonstrate imaginative mechanisms and processes for working with variant family forms within a reciprocity framework of expert-client consultation and collaboration (recognizing the client-centered phenomenon) should be given the highest priority for financial support.[12]

We recommend that an inter-agency government committee examine existing programs to explore the possibilities of rearranging policies and activities. Their objective will be to ensure that future environments (communities) <u>are built around families rather than trying to fit families and their members</u> into physical and social space developed on the principle of least cost and the presumed expertise of the professional. This committee would be composed principally of officials from departments providing human service programs, HUD, and other institutional and home building agencies. New forms of inter-agency organization may be required. Government agencies should support research and demonstrations on using existing as well as new resources and technology for building environments around the needs of families in an essentially "client-centered" approach.

We recommend that governmental agencies supplying supportive services to families under existing legislation remove restrictions that prohibit services to children and their families because they are attempting to devise new forms of family living, new patterns of socialization, and new ways of earning a living. Further, active assistance may be offered through research grants or long-term loans for projects to investigate living and working processes in group living experiments, focusing on the implications of these new family forms upon all aspects of the development of children. Such demonstrations must be thoroughly reviewed and evaluated and mechanisms created for the communication and exchange of ideas among participants.

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We recommend support of proposed and new legislation to assure families of an income adequate for meeting basic needs. This legislation should be based on the reallocation of existing resources to supply more adequate education, material amenities of living, nutrients, and housing. Basic survival resources and options for a fulfilling life are essential if all-encompassing programs of family life education, such as family planning, nutritional status, maternal care and the physical growth and development of the child, are to make any sense!

We recommend reviews and evaluations on the inter-agency level of HEW be made every five years to assure the quality of care and socialization of children in institutional settings and substitute families such as "foster care" families. Such questions should be investigated as: how much can the foster care program be "professionalized" to develop a cadre of motivated and economically rewarded parents to take on the difficult tasks of being socialization agents, affective and responsive adopted parents to children placed in their care? To what extent can kibbutz-like child care and development systems be used for institutionalized children? How can children be restored to their families to exercise the membership option, a right of all children?

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4. This is the reverse of too few options and was suggested by Robert Rapoport of the Tavistock Institute of London, Great Britain.

5. See Marvin B. Sussman, "Competence and Options: A Theoretical Essay," paper presented at NICHD-PAHO Conference on Assessment of Tests of Behavior from Studies of Nutrition in the Western Hemisphere, October 1970.

6. For a fuller explanation of this notion, see Marvin B. Sussman, "Family, Kinship and Bureaucracy." Forthcoming in Angus Campbell and Philip Converse, eds., Social Change and Human Change (New York City: Russell Sage Foundation, 1970).

7. From statistics to be included in Profiles of Children, chart-book of The White House Conference on Children and Youth, 1970.

8. See Nancy C. Hook and Beatrice Paolucci, "The Family as an Ecosystem," Journal of Home Economics, 62:5 (1970), pp. 315-318; and F. Kenneth Hare, "How Should We Treat Our Environment?" Science, January 1970, pp. 352-355 for an elaboration of this idea.

9. Marie R. Haug and Marvin B. Sussman, "Professional Autonomy and the Revolt of the Client," Social Problems, 17:2 (Fall, 1969), pp. 153-161.

10. In specific areas like socialization the unidirectional model is being questioned. See Betty E. Cogswell, "What Parents Owe their Children: Myths about Socialization," presented at the Family and Society Conference sponsored by the Merrill-Palmer Institute in Detroit, November, 1969, and "Socialization into the Family: An Essay on Some Structural Properties of Roles," in Sourcebook in Marriage and the Family, Marvin B. Sussman, ed., 3rd ed.(Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1968), pp. 366-377.

11. Ideas expressed verbally and in written communication by Paul Byers.

12. The notion of training at the university level comes from the report of the Family Life Division, U. S. Catholic Conference, submitted to The White House Conference on Children, October 1970.